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Abstract

Based upon an ethnographic study of western expatriate (expat) wives in Beijing, this paper describes these women's 'patriarchal bargain' and the emotional labor it involves. Relocation entails pressures to support the husbands' careers in various ways, interruption of their working and social life, and increased economic and social dependency. At the same time, however, it also allows them to enjoy leisure and prestige, and to conduct a privileged life style. This bargain demands an emotional labor on the women's part: an ongoing effort to feel good with their life in Beijing. The study focuses on the strategies the women use in order to cope with ambivalence, to be content, and to demonstrate contentment.

Keywords: expatriate wives, emotional work, patriarchal bargain.

Introduction

This study analyzes the ways in which western women who relocate as a result of their husbands' professional assignments, cope with being expatriate (expat) wives**.** The women studied are middle-class, highly educated, many of whom enjoyed successful careers and independent social roles before their relocation. They find themselves in a situation in which they are pressed upon to devote a large share of their time and energy to serving their husbands' careers, while neglecting most of their own previous social and occupational positions. They cope with these circumstances in a strange environment, away from their previous social and family networks, with very little support from their spouses, who are busy with their jobs.

The specific case that this work explores is the case of expat wives who live in Beijing. In many ways the lives of these women resonate with the lives of expat wives all over the world, and in some aspects the lives of expat wives elsewhere might be even more complicated and restricted, for example, in some African countries (e.g. Nigeria) where spouses of western expatriates are enclosed in compounds because of the danger. Still, the case of China has specific complexities that emphasize major difficulties faced by expat wives. First, the large cultural and linguistic gaps isolate the spouses from the local society much more than women who live in countries where English is more widely used or at least familiar to the local population, or where the local languages are more familiar to western women. The tradition of isolationism that characterizes the Chinese culture, the old reservations about integrating people from foreign cultures into the society, and the typical Chinese attitude of looking down at foreigners (Brady 2000, Dikotter 1992, Fairbank et al

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1965), strengthen the cultural gaps. These traditional attitudes towards strangers find expression in the local regulations that restrict foreigners' ability to integrate into the local society or to find a job in the labor market. Work permits are controlled and restricted by the authorities, and the few possibilities of obtaining work in the local labor market, such as English teaching jobs, are rarely pursued by the expat wives, partly due to the relatively low salaries. Another characteristic of the China case is that whereas in general women are estimated as comprising 14 percent of the overseas workforce (Stroh et al 2000), 96 percent of the working expats in Beijing are men. This means that almost every expat family in Beijing consists of a man who arrived for a job and a wife (and children) who accompanied him. Hence, talking about expat spouses in this case actually means talking about women's experiences. Apart from all the above, my work deals specifically with expat wives in Beijing because I, in fact, was one of them. For a year and a half I lived in Beijing, and I personally witnessed and experienced this special situation and the various ways that women found to handle it.

The central argument I want to make in this paper is that expat wives are not passive victims of the situation, but active agents who take part in a patriarchal bargain (Kandiyoti 1988; 1991). They cooperate with a structure that excludes them, but at the same time they enjoy numerous economic and social privileges. Based on an ethnographic study that I conducted while living in Beijing (between 1996 and 1998), I will explore a few aspects of this bargain, and focus on the emotional work (Hochschild 1979) done by the wives in order to produce and express content, and thus ensure the success of the bargain.

Work, family, and the roles of wives

The tension between devoting time and energy to one's career, studies and social life, and devoting these resources to the needs of the husband and family is experienced by many women. It is especially acute for women married to men whose career entails expectations on wives to perform tasks and fill roles that serve the husband's job. Papanek (1973), writing about American middle-class women married to professionals, terms this arrangement a "two-person single career", claiming that it serves as a mechanism of social control, helping to keep women in their place by channeling their career aspirations into support for the husband's career. Kanter, in her classic book "Men and Women of the Corporation" (1993/1977), describes the wives of corporation-men as subject to constraints of the husband's workplace, which dictate where they will live and what is possible for them in their married life, forcing them to take upon themselves most of the housework and childcare, thus limiting their opportunities to learn and develop. In addition, these constraints affect their social life, pressuring them to act in ways that will serve the interests of the husband's career. The wife's role in the "two-person single career" has a psychological cost for women, as it destroys their self esteem because they are expected to do things that they are reluctant to do, their time is not valued, and the price they pay in forgoing career building for themselves is not considered high by others, and hence not by themselves (Papanek 1973).

In spite of the decades that have passed since the works of Papanek and Kanter, their main arguments are still relevant, as indicated by later research on similar phenomena. Studies of the wives of clergymen (Wiggins Frame & Shehan 1994), of small entrepreneurs (Pavalko & Elder 1993), of physicians (Peters-Golden & Grant 1989), of military personnel (Jans 1989), of executives (Hochschild 1997) and of professional baseball players (Ortiz 1997), are just a few examples. They all point to the great pressure exerted on wives to fill

various roles related to the husband's career, ranging from bookkeeping, typing or sales promotion, to engaging in community activity that strengthens the husband's prestige. Strickland (1992) suggests seeing these various tasks, not as different types, but as points on a continuum of support that characterizes the life of wives of professionals in general.

Relocation, when a woman (and the children who live with her), migrate in the wake of a man who is sent by his employers to live in another region or country, intensifies the pressures on wives, and the psychological cost they pay. Studies of clergymen's wives prove this, showing that wives who relocated suffered much worse stress than wives who had not relocated (Wiggins, Frame & Shehan 1994). The literature on international management of human resources and relocation of company employees treats this issue as an "organizational problem" (De Cieri, Dowling & Taylor 1991). This literature focuses on the employees' experience, and discusses their spouses (who are mostly women) only in relation to their influence on the husband's productivity. Suffering from boredom, loneliness, and even despair, and failing to adjust to the move, the wives are usually portrayed as passive and suffering victims (Copeland & Norell 2002; Forster 1997; Frazee 1999; Harvey 1985, 1995; Lee 2005; Sievers 1998).

However, these women are not just subject to oppression and control, but are also active agents, who enjoy considerable material and social resources and privileges. It is true that in following their husbands many of these women give up a personal career and actively undertake a variety of tasks that support the husband's career and the interests of the organization, but within these pressures and constraints, they make use of resources and enjoy substantial economic and social privileges: wealth, leisure, the ability to dominate women of lower status who do most of their housework for them, and the ability to play with images and construct for themselves a prestigious identity as privileged women.

In order to discuss this twofold situation, and explain the complex aspects of the situation of expat wives, I wish to use Kandiyoti's (1988; 1991) concept, "patriarchal bargain."

Patriarchal bargains of privileged women

Writing about women in sub-Saharan Africa, Kandiyoti (1991) uses the term "patriarchal bargains" to describe both the constraints and the resources available for women to assume agency without disrupting the patriarchal system. For example, she mentions the ways in which Hausa women in Kano, Nigeria, who are secluded and have their mobility restricted, are able to trade cooked foods through the control they exercise over their children's labor, and also to enjoy limitations put on the services husbands may expect of them (ibid., 30). Other gender scholars have drawn on Kandiyoti's work and used the term patriarchal bargain to describe negotiations between Catholic nuns in the USA and the patriarchal order over autonomy and status (Ebaugh 1993), Korean immigrant women's negotiations with their husbands over cooperation in the household (Lim 1997), or the ways in which women with spiritual authority in Kano, Nigeria, take rights and privileges (Hutson 2001), without upsetting the patriarchal order. Most of these studies show that by letting women enjoy some degree of autonomy and power, the patriarchal system gains their cooperation.

In the case of the present study, cooperating with patriarchy means first and foremost accompanying the husband to China and, by this, entering a social structure that is more patriarchal than the one they knew in their home countries. The fact of not having jobs

makes these women, some of them for the first time, very dependent, financially and socially, on their husbands. Moreover, as the expatriate society is work and career oriented, consisting largely of people who come because of their jobs, and since most of the wives are not employed, they become socially weak. Since relocation often means promotion, the men, on their side, become more powerful. The wives' cooperation has great financial value, as companies have lately encountered increasing difficulties in finding suitable personnel for international assignments due to the reluctance of many women to accompany their husbands overseas (Frazee 1999).

However, joining the husbands is not enough, as their cooperation also demands a successful adjustment. The cost of failures of expatriates is estimated to range between $55,000 and $150,000 for a single expat (Mendenhall, Dunbar & Oddou 1987). The high rate of these failures, which causes severe damage to the sending organizations is, according to organizational research (Forster 1997), largely the result of non-adjusting wives. While objectifying these women and treating them as 'factors' which influence productivity, organization scholars suggest plans and programs for companies to deal better with the expatriates' spouses (Glanz & van der Sluis 2001).

Hence, the term 'patriarchal bargain' here has a distinctly economic meaning. An expat receives a "package" that includes a high salary, payment of most of the family's living expenses (including health insurance, private schooling), and other perks. This package enables the wives to live comfortably and not to worry about their expenses. Their high economic status also allows them freedom from most of the housework. Nevertheless, the economic character of the bargain should not mask its emotional side. Applying Kandiyoti's concept and writing about "liberal bargains" of Palestinian women, Sa'ar (2005) notes that "internalization of modes of thinking and knowing is central to the working of the liberal bargain" (Sa'ar 2005, 686). While Sa'ar focuses on the importance of adopting certain modes of thinking and knowing in order for the bargain to succeed, I would like to draw attention to the importance of performing emotional labor for the sake of the bargain. The women in the study have to feel good and express positive feelings in order to provide the support and deliver the images expected of them. To achieve this, they employ strategies of emotional work.

Emotional work and the task of being content

The term "emotional work" has two main meanings: centered on the self and centered on others. The first meaning refers to self-management of emotions, so that the self can experience (and also project outwards) the emotion appropriate to the situation (Hochschild 1979). The second means relating positively to others, for example, listening, supporting, and encouraging them, in order to help them to feel better (Erickson 1993; Hochschild 1983). Researchers of marriage and the family describe the importance of emotional work that is done for others within the family. Encouraging others, expressing appreciation of them, listening and advising, empathizing with their emotions, day after day and year after year, are no less important than caring for the household and the children if one wants the marriage to succeed (Erickson 1993; 2005). However, it is the women who do most of the emotional work (Erickson 2005). The implications for the women are severe. For one thing, emotional work done for others is time-consuming and demanding, and is often not appreciated and even belittled, all characteristics that can lead to burnout. In addition, the inequality that exists between men and women with

regard to others-centered emotional work generates a feeling that the women are not supported within the marriage, a feeling that has negative effects on their health (Strazdins & Broom 2004).

The literature on relocating wives refers to the considerable emotional work that wives are expected to do in supporting the rest of the family (Forster 1997; Harvey 1985; 1995). The move to a foreign country has adjustment difficulties for all the members of the family: to new working conditions, new schools and strange social environment. Overcoming these difficulties requires a great deal of emotional work. However, as the employed partner (most commonly the man) is busy with his work, he is barely free, physically or mentally, to engage in emotional work. Hence, as the findings of the present study will show, the overwhelming part of the burden of the emotional work falls on the women, without themselves receiving adequate support. This lack of support from the husband through all the difficulties of relocation emphasizes the importance of the self-centered emotional work, meaning the emotional work done by a person in order to create within herself emotions that will help her to cope with the situation.

Hochschild describes the difference between creating an impression in the Goffmanian sense, which is more superficial and does not involve deep transformation of emotion, and between emotional work which she calls "deep play." People, claims Hochschild, "not only try to conform outwardly, but do so inwardly as well" (1979, 556). She describes how people actively manage inner feelings or, in other words, engage in the "act of evoking or shaping as well as suppressing a feeling in oneself" (ibid, 561). People, according to Hochschild, do emotional work because they sense the existence of "laws of emotions" which dictate what is the appropriate emotion for every situation. They become aware of the fact that they are doing emotional work when they sense a gap between the emotions that arise in them and the emotions that they think they are supposed to feel in a given situation. This emotional work is their way of conforming to the relevant social order. The cost of this may be that emotions become commodities and resources in a system of social exchange. However, emotional work that really succeeds, argues Hochschild, involves inner persuasion that transforms the emotions on which the individual works into profound and authentic ones.

This paper discusses emotional work related to the ambivalence experienced by expat wives in regard to their life in Beijing. The women discussed here (like many other women) are part of a culture imbued with feminist values that call on women to seek self-fulfillment and autonomy. However, this same culture sanctifies the preservation of the family and encourages women to forgo their personal development for the sake of it, presenting their willingness to devote themselves to their husbands' needs as an expression of love and womanhood (Erickson 2005; Pavalko & Elder 1993). The ambivalence that this may create becomes particularly problematic in a situation of relocation, when a woman accompanies her husband overseas and forgoes her independent status, at least temporarily. Relocating makes it harder for women to integrate the two worlds: to conform to the patriarchal values regarding the gendered tasks of the wife while aspiring to fulfill feminist ideals. Relocation thus intensifies ambivalence and has potential for inducing confusion and stress. Dealing with it demands much self-centered emotional work, as will be discussed in this paper.

Methodology

The absence of ethnographic studies focusing on the experience of expat wives' guided my decision to conduct an in-depth study. During the 17 months that I lived in Beijing as both an expat wife and a researcher, I wrote field-notes at social gatherings and conducted in-depth interviews with 30 women who had followed their husbands - employees of international organizations or embassies- to Beijing.

I decided to concentrate on western women, aiming to identify important patterns and perspectives that cross boundaries of nationality, age and social circles within this population. Accordingly, my sample included women from various nationalities: half of them from the US (due to their large proportion in the general population of western expats in Beijing) and the others from Britain, Australia, Israel, France and Germany, in more or less equal numbers. For the same purpose I took care to include in the sample women from various residential areas, churches and clubs, and of various ages (from 34 to 60). I chose not to interview extremes cases, for example, a woman who was in a state of emotional breakdown and was drinking a lot. Generally speaking, the women I interviewed were white, middle class, with higher education (college or university degrees). As such, the participants in this study were fairly "typical of corporate and government international transferees" (Copeland & Norell 2002, 260). Twenty-two of the women had held jobs prior to this relocation (therapists, teachers, consultants, senior secretaries, social worker, nurse, librarian, flight attendant, dentist). The other eight were women who had just completed their studies before relocation (n=3), or had followed their husbands' careers to previous locations (n=5).

The women's social and academic background suggests that they had been exposed to feminist thought and that these ideas were part of their cultural repertoire; indeed, many of them were well versed in feminist ideas. This was demonstrated in the interviews when they joked, for example, about "going backward in time" or "being out of time" -relating to the feminist narrative which describes moving to more economic and social autonomy and building an independent life as progress for women. None of them referred to herself as a feminist activist, it was rather that feminist ideas and concepts were part of their vocabulary.

In the interviews I asked questions about their personal backgrounds, motivation for coming to China, daily and weekly routines and activities, interpersonal relationships, experiences related to being a stranger in Chinese society, and attitude towards being an expat wife. In addition to the interviews I wrote fieldnotes in various formal and informal events and gatherings to which I had access as an expatriate, such as religious occasions and afternoon meetings of groups of mothers and children.

Setting: Beijing expats' social system

Few studies have focused on the social life (rather than professional) of expatriate, although, as Harvey and Kiessling (2004) recently noted, the social environment of expatriates is worth exploring, because expats actually spend their lives first and foremost in the immediate and exclusive environment of the expat community. This environment is characterized as being exclusionary, an "environmental bubble" (Cohen 1977; Thompson & Tambyah 1999). These descriptions of expatriates living in fairly close enclaves has special relevancy in the case of Beijing. As a result of constraints imposed upon foreigners by the Chinese authorities at the time of the research they live in separate

housing. Many of the foreigners' social-cultural institutions, such as clubs or churches, are also supervised, limiting participation in them to holders of foreign passports. Consequently, the expats in Beijing live in a fairly bounded social and physical space, secluded from close contact with locals (Brady 2000). Spending their time mainly in the company of a narrow set of people and in limited spaces, relationships between them tend to be all-inclusive.

All the expats, men and women alike, share this social environment and have to adjust to it, but more so the trailing spouses. Unlike their husbands, who spend much of their lives in the company's activities, the women live their lives mainly within the bounds of the expat society, since government restrictions and language barriers usually prevent them from getting jobs of their own. They maintain intensive interactions with each other, usually within a narrow range of physical locations, which includes their residence and its surroundings, the foreigners' sports clubs, and western-style shopping centers and cafes in the area. The women who are their neighbors are the wives of their husbands' work colleagues, the mothers of their children's friends, and, by default, their closest friends. This social 'wifenet' created by women who spend the time overseas together becomes their most important source of support (Copeland & Norell 2002).

It is within this feminine world that the expat wives conduct most of their lives. They provide each other with necessary practical information (food stores, schools, etc.), receive support, play with statuses, and learn and teach each other the meaning of being an expatriate wife in Beijing. While some of this learning is formal, such as orientation days for newcomers held by relocation companies, who employ long-term expats for the purpose, most of it is informal, and takes place through women spending time together. One major theme to be learned is the need to present, and to construct, a sense of contentment. Asking the women about their everyday lives and their feelings towards life in Beijing revealed a great sense of ambivalence towards life in Beijing, on the one hand, and the existence of "feeling rules" (Hofstede 1978), on the other hand.

Feeling rules

The everyday life of expat wives in Beijing includes the performance of many traditional gender tasks. Some women described themselves as putting a great deal of effort into supporting their children through emotional crises, helping them to make new friends, and assisting them with their homework to a greater extent than they had ever done before. Other tasks mentioned by many of the women were related to the husband's job. Some women reported devoting up to four nights a week to hosting or being hosted by guests of the husband's company, and working in or for his office. A third kind of task the women were busy with, was community oriented, and included organizing activities for children and youth (such as groups of girl scouts), or various national, religious and general community events. All this work is done mainly by the wives, with very little support from their husbands, while having to cope at the same time with their adjustment difficulties. This situation creates bitter feelings, which emerged clearly in many of the interviews. In these conversations, the women talked about "being bored", "having to sacrifice", "being alone a lot" and "feeling depressed." Sometimes they described experiences as "terrible" or "traumatic", for example, when the husband was away for weeks and they were left alone with sick children, or when they were cheated while shopping. Some expressed discomfort with the ecological and esthetic aspects of the streets of Beijing, and the lack of recreational options. A few reported having "many tearful conversations" with their close girlfriends.

However, alongside the descriptions of difficulties, almost all of the women stated repeatedly that they were pleased with their life in Beijing, and emphasized the advantages that they had gained from the move. These contradictory expressions reflect the ambivalence experienced by these women. Furthermore, the women's statements indicate not only a mixture of emotions but also an effort to overcome negative emotions and produce contentment. As an illustration of this, consider the following extract from an interview with Cindy, from the US, who had lived in China for four years. Here she describes the changes she had gone through:

> *At the beginning I cried every weekend. I hated it and wanted to go home. For two years I cried. Now I like it here, I don't want to go back to the US so quickly. Now I like living here. Our life is here now… I have to like it, because my husband wants to stay here a long time. So I have to accept that, so I like it.*

When Cindy talks about herself as moving from hating to liking the situation, she is actually describing emotional work or "deep play" (Hochschild 1979) that succeeded in transforming her feelings towards her life in Beijing. Saying she "has to like it," she exposes the existence of "feeling rules" (Hochschild 1979) appropriate for the situation. This kind of obedience to feeling rules and the awareness of them, which is expressed in a somewhat cynical way, is even more evident when she talks about the professional background she had to leave behind on coming to China:

> *It destroyed my career in the USA. I was director of a shelter for 100 old people. I had to give it all up for my husband… Now I like being at home with the family, I don't want to go out to work, I want to stay home with my daughter. I like the traditional female role. I live outside time* [giggling]*… My husband is lucky.*

The giggle, her statement about being "outside time" and her husband being lucky, the use of the term "traditional female role" indicate that she is looking at the situation through the eyes of someone who does not take gender relations for granted, but has adapted to it. Moreover, it is through the eyes of someone who has the ability to look at it and also laugh at her own decisions. She talks about sacrifice in strong words: "it destroyed" her career, and at the same time she describes her adjustment to her current position in life, not only in terms of her behavior- staying at home - but also in terms of her inner feelings - "I want to stay home." This indicates that Cindy relates simultaneously to two sets of values: a feminist one, which encourages women to have careers and perceives the interruption of the career as a negative step, destruction, and a traditional patriarchal one, which sees women's place at the home, taking care of the family. Perhaps this ambivalence is not new (and it is certainly not unusual), and perhaps in the past Cindy could handle both roles, but the relocation forced her to give up living according to the feminist set of values and become, in her words: a "traditional" woman. This has the potential to cause pain and anger, and indeed Cindy says that she cried for two years. She eventually overcame this, and now she has succeeded in learning to "like it.'

Other women described various forms of adaptation of emotions to the situation. They said things like:

… Now I have gotten used to China… Altogether I like my life here…. But I know it isn't real life...

What the above examples illustrate, in sum, are the women's mixed feelings about life in Beijing and the existence of feeling rules, recognized by the women, which guide them to try and produce, or at least present, positive emotions. The following sections will describe some of the main strategies they use to do it: 1. finding positive meaning, such as heroism, merit, interest and kindness, in the tasks they perform; 2. creating the women's world of joy.

Finding positive meanings in traditional tasks

The following extract from an interview with Trudy from the US, now aged sixty, a nurse by profession but a woman who has spent most of her adult life following her husband's career, illustrates how she turns her difficult tasks in the family into a source of meaning and pride.

You come here and your husband has a job, status, support, and everything he needs at work. The children have school, friends, games, their lives have structure. And the one who is left with nothing and has to start from scratch is the expat wife, the mother. In every country she has to start all over again - to find everything that her family needs, to feed them, what kind of medical treatment to give them. She has to keep the home together, and that is more important abroad, and the harder the environment the more important it is. To keep the home as a safe place where they can talk about their difficulties and receive support and love. And she has to do this in a place where she cannot speak, read or understand the language.

Trudy describes her role in the family - which is first and foremost emotional and others-centered: to give support, listen, and love. Her work is presented as hard to perform but "important," adventurous and challenging. The expression of loss is followed by sanctifying the sacrifice, which turns it into a source of meaning. As someone who spent most of his life subjugating her own career to the career of her husband, her move to China did not create, but rather highlighted the gendered relations she describes.

While Trudy's description refers to work at home, Jane, a former senior secretary, also from the US, draws on a similar emotional strategy in order to talk about jobs she does (voluntarily) for her husband, who heads the personnel department of a large company:

I help my husband in the office with all the social events, because he doesn't have enough staff to do all the planning: parties at Christmas, family trips in the spring. In the fall we sponsor a big convention.

Jane explains her support as the result of actual need for her due to the lack of a sufficient workforce. By taking on these jobs she solves the company's problem and saves it money, as she does it all voluntarily, but she does not talk of exploitation, but rather emphasizes the necessity of her contribution. Her deep involvement is indicated by the phrase "we sponsor." This use of "we" was also made by Lisa, the wife of a manager of a German-Chinese joint venture, and a former librarian herself, in talking about the jobs she did for her

husband's company and explaining how they provided her with an outlet for her skills.

> *During the day I go shopping, walk around, doing things for my husband. He always needs to buy things for his computer. I am very familiar with the computer stores here, and get things for him… My husband is the only German in his company, all the rest are Chinese, so we have to do everything by ourselves.*

So far, I have demonstrated how women adopt two kinds of gendered tasks, which are, to some extent, forced upon them: supporting the family in adjusting to the relocation, and doing tasks related to the husband's work, and how they rationalize these tasks and relations, thus making them satisfactory. The next extract will demonstrate how a third kind of gendered task, namely, community building activity (Andizian & Streiff 1982) serves as a source of influence and power. A salient example of this is the International Newcomers Network (INN). This social institute holds monthly meetings, open to all the expatriates in Beijing for a token fee, but the times of the meetings (Monday morning) and the language used (English) determine (and, naturally, reflect) the composition of the participants: a group of women, nearly all of them from English speaking countries, none of them with a job. Each INN meeting includes a lecture relating to the expatriates' life in the city, for instance, the options available for education, cookery using local products, and subjects like "The crisis of migration to a new country for the expat wife." They offer pamphlets advertising various institutions and services for foreigners, such as schools or clinics. At the meetings, all the participants are asked to sit according to their place of residence, and each residential center is represented by a volunteer who provides information to the area's newcomers. The club thus gives expat wives an opportunity to exhibit knowledge, experience and also seniority, in relation to the other women. This allows them a space in which they are in the center, and not in a liminal position, as in the expatriate male-dominated society. Creating a women's world is one of the expat wives' major ways of dealing with difficulties, and the dominant theme of this social world is enjoyment. While ambivalence and difficulties were evident in some of the interviews (as illustrated throughout this work), the collective sphere was characterized largely by the absence of negative expressions and by a shared project of having pleasure.

The women's world of joy

A new expat wife who comes to town learns from the 'old' ones how to spend her time. Her new friends take her to shop for material and invite her to meet the tailor who makes them suits. They introduce her to their Tai Chi teacher, and make her an appointment for a massage. Together they design their homes and clothes, develop a taste for art and antiques, and go out to cafes and restaurants. What makes all this possible is the money earned by the husband, and the aid of cheap local maids, referred to as Ayee (aunt in Chinese), who perform much of the housework while the expatriate wives go out to have fun.

Many of the leisure activities were related to shopping, which was often done in the company of other women. My interviewees described "strolling around the market with girlfriends," going to "a new store that has just opened," and "exploring." Going out to shop was a major way to get to know the Chinese environment, and it was sometimes frustrating, and raised feelings of being cheated and lost. Talking about shopping was common, as it raised interest in women from diverse backgrounds and age groups, and could serve as a common denominator. This subject also enabled some women to present and construct

prestigious identities.

To illustrate this, I will quote from one social informal gathering: an outing to a restaurant, attended by twelve women who were celebrating the birthday of one of them. All of the women at this event were from Israel, but the meanings it had were evident also in international gatherings that included women from different nationalities. Dressed up, they got into cars and drove to one of the western style entertainment areas of Beijing (the san-li-tun). As Ziva, one of them, was about to leave in a few days' time to go back home for vacation for the first time since arriving in Beijing some six months earlier, one of the women asked her if she bought presents to take home with her already:

Anna: *Have you bought presents yet?*

Ziva*: I've bought shirts for my father and my father-in-law. For my friends I have bought tablecloths, and all kinds of games for the children. I'm bringing my mother a silk blouse, and small things for all my friends from my last job.*

Lee: *You've gone overboard. Why for your old work friends?!*

Anna: *I don't know what to bring any more. This is my fourth visit and I've already brought everything.*

Tali (giggling): *I have orders. My sister-in-law saw my daughter's watch last time so now I have to bring them for all the cousins* (smiles around the table and the conversation continues).

The elegant dressing, the fancy restaurant and the discussion on presents contribute to an image of being privileged women: affluent, and having a good time. There was no sign of any explicit conflict between the women in almost all the social gatherings I attended. On the contrary: they were usually characterized by the effort of each of the participating women to present herself to the others in the best light, to dress, behave, and speak in ways that would help to make a good impression on the others. This included a lot of talking about fashion, design, antiques, traveling, comparing prices of furniture they bought and discussing nice places to go out to. Missing from this evening (and many similar ones) were any signs of anger or protest towards husbands or towards the gender relations. The women's gatherings were not used to discuss the problematic of being an expat wife in Beijing, with all the pressures and the sacrifices it sometimes entails, but rather to strengthen each woman's endeavors to deal with these difficulties and to make themselves feel good about it. It is important to mention that only expat wives participated in this gathering, while other women who had come to Beijing on their own to work or study were not invited. Their exclusion indicates that factors like shared language or nationality were not the major basis for participation in these women's gatherings, nor simply the shared gender, but the social situation of being an expatriate wife.

Conclusion

This study provides an examination of women who renegotiate the meanings and feelings related to their feminine identities. While experiencing increased wealth and leisure time as a result of following their husbands to China as expatriate wives, they must also give up their self sufficiency, careers and communities, and focus on family responsibilities. This results in ambivalent feelings on their side. But, as part of what they perceive is expected of them as expat wives is to be and to express content with self and with situation, these women

engage in emotional labor aimed in transforming their emotions to positive ones. The main strategies to do so are described and discussed: taking roles which are partly forced upon them and using them as resources for self empowerment and self fulfillment; building a women's world that enables them to learn how to enjoy the situation and to construct prestigious identities.

This study demonstrates how emotional labor centered on the self is practiced, not just individually deep inside people's hearts, but also collectively. Helms et al (2003), describe how emotional work done by wives together with their close friends strengthens their spousal relations and helps them to feel more contented in their married lives. This present study shows that a group comprised of women who share a similar situation - even though no common background - plays a significant role in enhancing each women's contentment by creating a collective positivism regarding their shared situation. Perceptions and strategies are developed together, collectively processed, and passed on from one to the other. This shared effort includes also the public avoidance of expression of negative expressions. The interactions and negotiations between the women, and not just negotiations between men and women, help, then, to sustain the patriarchal bargain. The findings of this study therefore is significant for our understanding of the social psychological and material underpinnings of subordination, in the sense that they draw our attention to the great meaning of emotional work that is done within and supported by women's networks, in sustaining patriarchal bargains.

My study focused on the typical experience of western expat wives in Beijing. It did not explore variations between different types of women. Further studies may cast light on the impact of individual differences in social and personal background (age, size of family, education, nationality, religion and so forth), on expat wives' experiences. In addition, it would be relevant to compare the experiences of expat wives in various cultural settings.

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